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(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

January 10, 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: OXCART Phasedown

We are now in the process of planning the phasedown of the OXCART operation in accordance with Alternative 3 of the BOB/CIA/DOD Study (five aircraft phased out in July 1967; the remainder by January 1, 1968. In view of the loss of an A-12 last week, we may phase out only four aircraft in July). There are some aspects of this action which were not specifically addressed in the study and others where some variation from the assumptions made in the study may be desirable. I would like to have your approval or guidance on the following matters affecting our course of action.

1. Operational Capability During Phasedown:

We plan to maintain the numbers of aircraft indicated in Study Alternative 3 in full operational status for the periods cited in the Study. In particular, the capability to deploy to Kadana (BLACK SHIELD) on two week notice will be maintained until the requirement is lifted by the 303 Committee or is assumed by SAC SR-71's. Between now and July 1, the OXCART Detachment will have the capability of simultaneously accomplishing both BLACK SHIELD and SKLARK (Cuba coverage). After July 1, the Detachment will still be capable either of deploying or operating from [] but not both simultaneously.

2. Responsibility in Event Aircraft are Removed from Storage:

In order to effectively plan the details of storing the aircraft components and associated equipment (engines, cameras, etc), it is necessary to work with the organization

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NRO and USAF review(s) completed.

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which would be responsible for operating the aircraft in the event that removal from storage were directed. In view of the phaseout or reassignment of contractor and CIA personnel (including assigned Air Force personnel) associated with the OXCART Program, SAC will, by mid FY 1968, be the only organization capable of operating these aircraft. We are therefore proceeding on the assumption that, if removed from storage, these aircraft would be operated by SAC.

3. Location of Stored Aircraft:

25X1 Although the most straightforward and probably cheapest way to store the aircraft would be to utilize the storage facilities [] public and Congressional queries would probably be aroused by the appearance at that site of very late model Mach 3 aircraft. We are therefore examining the cost and feasibility of alternatives, including the possibility of storage at [] with minimal caretaker and security protection.

4. Option for Civilian Pilot Operation of the SR-71:

25X1 In the Memorandum for the President, reference was made to the option of the possible use of civilian pilots for covert missions with the SR-71. No action is being taken to plan for or implement this option pending further guidance and direction. However, it should be noted that the simplest way to achieve this capability at the present time would be to plan to retain a few of the OXCART pilots, nominally as Lockheed SR-71 test pilots at Palmdale. Since the SR-71 requires a two-man crew, observer crew members would also be required. The proficiency of these civilian crews could be maintained indefinitely by continuous rotational assignment of aircraft to Palmdale (actually and nominally) for test, modification, overhaul (IRAN), etc. Another possibility with some obvious shortcomings is to make arrangements at Beale to "civilianize" on short notice certain SAC crews if this ever became necessary. The feasibility and cost of these and other options will be further investigated if you so direct.

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A more detailed summary of the assumptions and ground rules being used to plan the OXCART phasedown is attached.

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NRO

Alexander H. Flax

Attachment
OXCART Phasedown
25X1 Assumptions

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